

Fanning the Flames

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Summary: Jenna can't sleep and decides to explore the town. What could possibly go wrong? If only she knew. Rated for slight language.

***Chapter 1*: Fanning the Flames**

Hello! Welcome to this one-shot I wrote when an idea pinged into my head and I couldn't get it out and really felt like writing so I did. The idea basically consists of Jenna developing an attraction toward Alex during the journey and he is all too aware of it and uses it to his advantage. I can personally get on board with it because she seems to really despise him during TLA and a part of me muses whether it's because she has these feelings but knows they're bad and that he's a terrible person and she's trying to shake off the attraction and ignore the conflicting feelings she has. So yes. Enjoy, any and all feedback is appreciated, warm hugs and tasty snacks for all.

Considering how chaotic the last week had been, it should have been easy to sleep on the first evening in seven that provided a proper bed. Unfortunately, Jenna hadn't even felt remotely tired when the group had retired for the evening and had tossed and turned and flipped her pillow to expose the cool side at least ten times before giving up. It was a warm, clear evening so she had left the inn without bothering to grab any extra layers, being careful not to wake the others.

It had been almost a week since the Idejima peninsula had crashed into Indra and the group had been constantly on the move since then. They had passed through the town of Daila but it had been impossible to rest properly there, as it had been hit badly by the tidal wave caused by the earthquake triggered by the Venus Lighthouse. As they had passed through, Jenna had felt a pang of guilt at the sight of the villagers collecting the belongings that hadn't been destroyed together and draining the water from the ground.

She had then quashed the guilt angrily. She had wanted no part in the quest and refused to feel awful about something that she had no control over. The group had pressed on, exhausted, before finally arriving in Madra. They had been given a rather cold reception by the guards at the gate but, considering the town had recently been attacked by pirates, Jenna couldn't really blame them. Still, she thought wearily, it would have been nice for people to welcome them in for a change. *If only you knew why we're travelling in the first place...*

She was mildly surprised at how relaxed some of the townspeople were despite the recent attack. Most tradesmen had packed up their wares hours ago, not taking any chances, but there were still a couple of people at their stalls despite the late hour. Jenna walked towards them and her nose was instantly greeted with the pleasant smell of delicious food. She inhaled deeply and smiled – her favourite. Her eyes sought the source and she saw the stall in question a few paces away. The seller, a young woman, caught Jenna's expression and grinned.

"Can I fix you up with anything?"

Jenna laughed and patted her stomach. "I couldn't eat another bite! Too much inn food." She eyed the stall longingly, wishing she hadn't stuffed her face earlier. The inn had provided excellent food and lots of it and after several days of eating hardly anything, Jenna hadn't wasted the opportunity to eat well. "Are you open tomorrow?"

"Certainly am! Bright and early, though it'll be my sister here in the morning. I'm more of a night owl," she said cheerfully.

"Great. I'll be there, believe me!" Jenna knew it was a pointless expense, that the inn also provided breakfast free of charge and that the group should save their money where they could. However, the journey so far had offered very little in the way of pleasant things and she felt she was entitled to this one comfort.

She continued to walk and was close to leaving the market area when something caught her eye. The weapons merchant was still present and was packing up his belongings but hadn't quite finished, so some blades still sat on display. Amongst them was a rapier and Jenna was instantly drawn to it. She padded over to the stand to get a closer look, catching the attention of the merchant, who smiled at her.

"Like the look of that one, aye?"

"It's stunning," she whispered, staring at it. It really was - made of steel, it had a delicate appearance complete with an elegant hilt formed from fine, curved metal.

The merchant set his box down and walked over to the stand. "Know much about rapiers, then?"

"Not really," Jenna admitted sheepishly. She had been provided with a basic sword during the journey to the first two lighthouses and had only used it when absolutely necessary. Saturos and Menardi had done almost all of the fighting and Jenna had found the blade too heavy and cumbersome to have put it to good use. "I was hoping for something a little lighter than what I have at the moment."

"Pick 'er up, see how she feels," he offered. She smiled her thanks and took the handle gingerly. The blade must have been more than a metre long but Jenna was fairly tall so she knew it wouldn't be an issue. It *did* feel light and very

comfortable in her hand. "Can't cut trees down but it can certainly leave a mark. May look delicate but she's strong and sturdy. Can't go wrong." He picked up the box again and started walking to the storage room. "'Ave a proper look, I'll get these away then we can talk, aye?"

Jenna knew better than to just start swinging it around but could already tell it was much wieldier than her sword. It shined even in the dim light and it was the first time she had actually admired a weapon. "Yes, this will do," she murmured to herself. Another expense, but it would be a worthy one. After all, what use was she going to be with a blade that didn't suit her?

"I had you marked as a staff person, though you could certainly do considerably more damage with that," a voice stated from behind her. Jenna recognised it straight away and the effect was immediate. Her heart leapt into her throat, her mouth was suddenly dry and her fingertips were alarmingly sweaty all of a sudden and she tried to hide it all as she whirled around, eyes wide, to see Alex standing a few feet away. He threw his arms up and leapt back in jest, amusement in his eyes. He eyed the rapier and smiled. "Careful, Jenna, you never know where you might accidentally stick that thing with moves like that."

"I know exactly where I'd like to stick it," she growled, composing herself. He openly laughed and her heart rate increased.

"If you're gonna do that, don't do it with the guards watching." The merchant had reappeared and looked highly amused at the exchange. "So, you interested?"

"What?" Jenna asked him in alarm, face flushing. He glanced at the rapier and she mentally slapped her face with her

hand. *The blade. Right. Focus, Jenna.* "Oh! No. I mean yes! I left my money at the inn," she fumbled. "I'm definitely interested though. I'll come back tomorrow before we leave." She gently placed the rapier on the stand and nodded at the merchant before turning hastily to make a swift exit.
Smooth. Real smooth.

"Not even a hello?" Alex chimed, feigning sorrow. "After all we've been through together? I'm wounded, dear." His eyes were laughing and she felt a prick of irritation at his mocking.

"It would be pointless," she said scathingly, "as you're just going to vanish again, so there's no point wasting the time."

"You seem particularly offended about my disappearance." Alex commented lightly. "Any reason for that?"

Jenna felt her face grow warm and silently willed herself to stop being such a moron. Her fingertips were still damp and she wished she had been wearing gloves. "You abandoned us, what do you think?" *Yes, wit, you can return to me any time now.*

He smiled and extended his arm outwards. "Walk with me?"

Eh? Jenna stared at him, expression caught halfway between 'why on Weyard would I do that?' and 'go to hell, smug bastard'. "I'd rather walk barefoot on hot coals," she spat. She was painfully aware as to how defensive she sounded and knew he'd pick up on it.

"You would be a foolish lady to reject such an offer," the merchant, who had apparently been listening in as he packed up the last of his wares, piped in. Jenna glanced toward him, feeling slightly irritated. "Especially from such a

handsome man." He winked at her before picking up the final box and walking off.

Jenna had never quite been so lost for words before and her mouth opened and closed a couple of times in shock. Her mind cursed the merchant to hell as her mind worked to formulate a suitable insult. She could practically feel the mirth of the Mercury Adept standing behind her and could picture his expression without having to look at him.

"You might want to consider using the money from your sale tomorrow to buy some glasses!" Jenna shouted after the merchant, who disappeared into the storage room, shoulders shaking with laughter. She turned to find Alex stood in exactly the same position, arm extended, inviting her over.

"I must insist. There was an attack on this town very recently. It's dangerous for anyone to be out alone at this time of night. One would benefit from extra company, or a bodyguard," he finished with a smirk.

"I don't need looking after," Jenna said firmly.

"I was referring to myself," he said lightly and she couldn't suppress a small smile at the remark. *Pull yourself together, woman!* He gestured to her once more and turned to walk towards the outskirts of the town.

A million thoughts rushed through Jenna's head all at once, ranging from 'don't do it, Jenna' to 'BAD, BAD, VERY BAD'. His offer of a walk could only mean that he was after something. Why else would he bother talking to her? He'd been all too happy to leave them on Idejima and his hasty retreat when they had crossed paths in Daila suggested he was done with them. But here he was and he had appeared to her while she was alone. Coincidence? Or had he deliberately waited for the opportunity to speak with her

while no-one else was present? It was late, after all. What were the odds of him being out for a casual stroll at this time of night?

All of the rational thoughts in her brain weren't enough to stop her from following him. *I must be mad*. Mad, foolish and a whole host of other things. She couldn't stop the small voice inside that said she was secretly pleased he was here. *Oh, shut up*. She caught up and they walked side by side in silence. It had been a while since she had been so close to him and the effect was overwhelming. Jenna realised that this was the first time she had seen him without any armour. He was wearing a simple shirt and pants, fitting for the warm Madran weather. Even his gloves were missing. She sneaked a glance at his hands, which were slender and pale and impossibly flawless and so very *Alex*. The lack of armour would make any other person appear vulnerable, but not him. Jenna knew there was no such thing as a perfect human, but this one came damn close. He emitted everything that was calm and cool and she felt it acutely, to the point where the hair at the back of her neck stood up despite the warmth of the evening.

"You are unusually quiet tonight, Jenna," he said and even his voice had an effect on her. She loved the sound but hated the words that came out and it caused an eternal conflict within her mind.

"I like the silence," she said quietly. *Liar*.

"Hmm, I doubt that," he stated with a hint of amusement in his crystal-clear voice. "You're tense and your breathing is irregular. Are you coming down with something? Or is it something else?"

"Any luck with a boat?" Jenna said quickly, changing the subject. If he was wanting to talk, there were a thousand subjects better than the one that was currently being discussed.

He smiled at the abrupt question. "Unfortunately not. It seems Indra is completely devoid of boats, ships, rafts, anything remotely sea-worthy. Alhafra seems to be the place to try next, though getting to Osenia itself may prove challenging." *So we're wasting our time here. Noted. I'll tell Felix in the morning.*

"Is that where you're going next, then?"

"Perhaps. It seems like the likeliest option, though things could change," Alex said mysteriously. Question-dodging again. Jenna was becoming used to the idea that she'd never get a straight answer out of him. It frustrated her to no end. "I suppose your group will be following?"

Jenna huffed slightly. "We aren't *following* you," she said crossly. "You're the one who left to swan off around the continent as you pleased."

"Though I can't deny that, we do seem to run into each other rather often." Surprisingly, his tone suggested that it wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

They reached a lookout point on the very edge of the town that sat at the top of a small hill. It swept around so one could walk around and stare out over the town, with a wooden barrier in place to prevent people from falling off. They stopped at this point and, as Jenna looked out across the town, she had to admit it looked beautiful. The sky was clear and filled with stars and candlelit lanterns were scattered across the streets, providing a warm, welcoming glow.

"What a lovely sight," Alex said quietly. Jenna looked up at him, noting how close he stood. He was staring out at the town with a relaxed expression, though there was a sense of determination in the expression, too. She let out a small noise of agreement, her mind all over the place. If only the circumstances were different, she thought with a pang of something akin to sadness. If there wasn't a journey to undertake, if the world didn't need saving. If none of them had this huge burden that was settled onto all their shoulders. She would just be able to enjoy the night in all its beauty, enjoy the gentle breeze that swept through the town and surrounding area. She would laugh freely and dance amongst the lights in the town. And Alex would just be Alex and in her fantasy, he would be here with her, enjoying it as much as she was. He was here with her now, but it couldn't be and she felt an ache and a deep sense of longing and grief for what she would never be able to have.

Stop being so silly. Your feelings wouldn't be reciprocated anyway. Stop it.

"What do you want, Alex?" There had to be a reason he was here and she felt a sudden desire to get away from him and return to the inn. If she remained close to him for much longer, her mind would run away with her and she would drive herself mad.

"Must there be a reason?" He looked down at her and her breath caught in her throat. "It isn't possible to just walk for the sake of walking?"

"There must be a reason," Jenna said quietly, unable to keep some bitterness out of her tone. "I find it quite hard to believe that you'd just go for a stroll with one of the people you were so eager to leave behind." She wasn't looking at

him and was staring out across the town. She didn't see him move but felt the movement as he walked behind her.

"Perhaps my departure was abrupt, I'll give you that," he said softly. "Under the circumstances, I thought it would be better if we split up. There is more chance of finding a ship that way." He stopped behind her and he was very close. She could feel the warmth of his skin and she felt goose bumps form on her own. "There's no reason we can't join up again once one of us finds one."

Jenna stared straight ahead and tried to ignore the feeling of his breath on her ear and the tingling feeling in her fingertips. *Turn and leave. Leave now.* Her feet stayed exactly where they were and she made no move to turn and walk away. "If you find one first, you won't wait for us."

"On the contrary, I would seek to inform you as soon as I found one. You forget that my goal is the same as your own – to ignite the lighthouses. How would I achieve that if I sailed off without your group or the Stars? Likewise, I would hope that you would offer me the same courtesy if you were successful first."

"I doubt Felix would allow that," she said, her voice also soft but not quite as steady.

"Yes, I suspect you're right."

"He hates you," she stated bluntly. "To be fair, he has good reason to."

"After all I've done for him, too." That caused her to scoff. "Still, perhaps all hope is not lost. Felix is easily persuaded, or at least he has been since I've known him."

A pair of arms found their way round her shoulders, causing her to freeze on the spot. This was the closest she had ever been to someone and it was *him* and it was too much. Her mind was racing and breathing was suddenly a very difficult task. Her breath hitched and she knew he was aware of it but she had absolutely no control at that moment. Her mind screamed at her to push away and get out of there but another voice kept insisting that wasn't this what she wanted? *No*, she stressed firmly but her resolve was weak and she hated herself for it.

He rested his chin on her right shoulder and gazed out toward the town. His voice was barely above a whisper. "He wouldn't listen to me, but he would listen to you. His sister and closest ally." His breath tickled her ear and she closed her eyes, hoping it would diminish the intensity of the moment.

"Why should I do that?" She tried to keep her voice level and controlled but it was an exceptionally difficult task. *Why aren't you walking away?!*

"You yourself said we should keep together as a group. Do you not remember?"

He was using her own words against her and the fact that he could do it so easily scared her. Even if Felix did manage to find a ship first and Alex came along, he would likely only ditch them again once the ship had served its purpose. It was better that he wasn't with them as he was proving unreliable. The irritating voice reminded her she only felt that way because she would hate for him to leave again and she wished she could shut that voice out.

"I am curious as to why you are so eager to travel with me," he said, voice quiet and full of amusement. "I am no longer

essential to the quest."

"Strength in numbers," she managed, feeling her pulse quicken. She could taste the air and it was full of electricity. *Oh, Jenna. You're so obvious.*

There was a gentle exhale of breath and she felt him smile. He had complete control and they both knew it. "You're a terrible liar."

There was a moment of silence in which neither moved and both simply stood. Jenna opened her eyes and gazed down at the town again. The beauty of it had somewhat diminished for her and she would never look at the town the same way again. From this moment, she would only have memories of the place linked with this exchange.

"Do let me know when you find a ship, if you would be so kind."

That stirred something within her and she felt genuine anger for the first time during the evening. Despite everything, her raging tide of emotions and conflicted mind, she was angered by his assumption that she would do as he asked. The fire that burned within her came back with full force and with it, she felt some of her strength and resolve return.

"And what am I to do, if we are successful, to get the message to you? Send a carrier pigeon? Send out smoke signals? Play a specific melody on a particular harp three villages over?" Her tone was sharp and strong and her words caused him to laugh. She stepped to the side, shrugging out of the embrace, breaking the spell and he did nothing to stop her. She sensed his amusement and knew he was wearing a smug expression without having to look and it only served to anger her more. He thought he had won but

he was wrong. She turned, keeping her back to him and didn't glance in his direction as she began to walk away.

"Find your own damn ship."